

“Preliminary Comments on Mobilizing the Masses, 1953”

Translated and Introduced by Alex-Thai D. Vo

Modelled after the Chinese experience, the land reform undertaken by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam of 1953–56 is perhaps the most important domestic policy of the Vietnamese Communist revolution. Because of a scarcity of primary sources, however, very little is known about the influence of Chinese advisors on this policy. Luo Guibo’s recommendations on mobilizing the masses to carry out land reform are one of the very few known documents drafted by a leading Chinese advisor to the Hanoi government. Translating and making this document available makes possible a rare glimpse of the Chinese perspective on and assessment of the situation in Vietnam in the early 1950s. It also illuminates one aspect of the influential role of Chinese advisors in Sino–Vietnamese relations during that decade, especially in the controversial land reform campaign.

Keywords: First Indochina War, Hồ Chí Minh, Trường Chinh, Luo Guibo, Chinese advisors, land reform, mass mobilization, Mao Zedong, Sino–Vietnamese relations.

On 9 October 1952, a seven-page document, written in Vietnamese and entitled “Preliminary Comments on Mass Mobilization, 1953” (*Ý kiến sơ bộ về vận động quần chúng năm, 1953*), reached Hồ Chí Minh. Direct and purposeful, the document outlined the steps for mobilizing the masses. The document arguably became the template for the mass mobilization and land reform campaign undertaken by the Vietnamese Workers’ Party (VWP, Đảng Lao Động Việt Nam) between 1953 and 1956. The campaign prompted the support from Vietnamese peasantry necessary to the defeat of French forces at Điện Biên Phủ on 7 May 1954 and enabled the VWP to consolidate its

power in northern Vietnam.¹ The mass mobilization was also a violent campaign that brought about the “sky-shaking and earth-shattering”² change that most Vietnamese in the rural North experienced during the 1950s.

The document that reached Hồ Chí Minh in early October had been signed on 3 September 1952 by “Quý” — short for Lã Quý Ba (Luo Guibo), the head of the Chinese Political Advisory Group to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) from 1951 to 1954, and the first ambassador of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) to that same state from 1954 to 1957.

The historiography of the wars in twentieth-century Vietnam is large and growing, but very little has been written on the relationship between China and Vietnam during the First Indochina War (1946–54) and Second Indochina War (1959–75). The few published studies tend to accentuate the relationships between and the decision-making processes of national leaders — matters such as the comradeship between Mao Zedong and Hồ Chí Minh or the diplomatic influence of Zhou Enlai on the negotiation of the 1954 Geneva Accords (Chen 2001; Duiker 2001; Logevall 2012). Some accounts discuss the presence of Chinese advisors in Vietnam, and especially their influence during the Battle of Điện Biên Phủ and the DRV’s land reform campaign (Zhai 2000; Dommen 2001; Gaiduk 2003; Brocheux and Hémery 2009; Calkins 2013). However, many of these studies often simply grouped the Chinese personnel sent to Vietnam ambiguously as “Chinese advisors” (*cố vấn Trung Quốc*) but make very little effort to explain who these advisors were, what specific roles they played, or whether there is concrete evidence for any influence that they had on the decision makers.

In calling attention to Luo Guibo’s September 1952 recommendations to the VWP, and especially to Hồ Chí Minh, I argue for the need to translate and publish this important historical document. For it illuminates one aspect of the influential role of Chinese advisors in Sino–Vietnamese relations during the 1950s, and especially on the DRV’s controversial campaign of land reform.³ This document is important for several reasons. First, it contextualizes the relationship

between the PRC and the DRV during the First Indochina War, especially as that relationship involved the importation of Chinese experience into Vietnam through Chinese advisors and their recommendations. Second, it describes the important role and direct influence of Chinese advisors in the formation and implementation of the Vietnamese land reform campaign of 1953–56. Finally, as a little known historic document, it demonstrates the existence of records about a certain aspect of PRC–DRV relations that the government currently in power in Hanoi does not necessarily want to acknowledge or to see made available to the public.

The Presence of Luo Guibo and Chinese Advisors in Vietnam

Luo Guibo prepared "Preliminary Comments on Mass Mobilization, 1953" at a time when the DRV, under the leadership of the VWP, was most in need of the PRC's aid in the form of weapons, material resources and political and military advisors. The DRV needed to consolidate power, to gain popular support and to win the war against the French. Three years before, in 1949, the VWP under the leadership of Hồ Chí Minh had been mired in a protracted guerilla war with the French. The Soviet Union, the beacon of international communism, had been more concerned with Europe than with revolutionary developments in Southeast Asia. Mao and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) were more occupied with the intense civil war against Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government. It was not until Mao Zedong proclaimed the founding of the PRC on 1 October 1949 that the revolutionary hopes of Hồ Chí Minh and the VWP's were revitalized. In December 1949, Hồ Chí Minh dispatched two representatives, Lý Bích Sơn and Nguyễn Đức Thủy, to Beijing with a request for Chinese assistance and for diplomatic recognition for his government (Zhai 2000, p. 13).

Upon receiving Hồ Chí Minh's request, acting chairman of the Central Committee of the CCP Liu Shaoqi — known in Vietnamese as Lưu Thiếu Kỳ — convened a 24 December meeting of the CCP Politburo to determine the situation in Indochina. Four days later,

Liu cabled Hồ Chí Minh on behalf of the CCP Central Committee to specify that the PRC would agree to enter into diplomatic relations with the DRV, and that the PRC government would send a team to Vietnam to assess the DRV's needs. By early 1950, China had already opened communications with Vietnam. Liu Shaoqi, with authorization given by Mao while the latter was visiting Moscow, selected Luo Guibo as the liaison representative (*người đại diện liên lạc*) of the CCP Central Committee. Chosen because his experience as a guerrilla leader gave him the grounding to manage a Chinese advisory mission in Vietnam, Luo was dispatched on a secret mission to Vietnam on 16 January 1950 (Chen 2001, p. 120).

Born on 14 July 1908, in Nankang County, Jiangxi Province, Luo Guibo became a member of the CCP in January 1927. Between 1927 and 1934, he served as a military commander and was one of the founding members of the Southern Jiangxi Soviet Revolutionary Base. From November 1930 to May 1931, he participated in the counterstrike of the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army against the Nationalist government's First and Second Encirclement Campaigns in Jiangxi. Following the collapse of the Southern Jiangxi base, Luo participated in the year-long Long March to Yan'an between October 1934 and October 1935, and he was among the estimated eight thousand people who survived the retreat. During the 20 August – 5 December 1940 military campaign against Japanese forces in central China known as the "Hundred Regiments Offensive", Luo served as the Southern Front Commander of the Shanxi–Suiyuan Border Area. Prior to his appointment as the Chinese liaison representative in Hanoi, Luo had been director-general of the General Office of the PRC's Central Military Committee (MFAPRC 2014).

Luo's mission as PRC liaison representative to the DRV included establishing contact with the Vietnamese Communists, investigating the general situation in Vietnam and reporting his findings to Beijing so that Chinese leaders could make decisions on assisting the Vietnamese Communists. Before the trip, Luo met the Vietnamese delegates in Beijing in order to acquaint himself with Vietnamese customs and practices. Accompanying Luo on the trip to Vietnam

was a staff of eight, including a telegraph operator, secretaries and guards. Luo and his team arrived in Vietnam on 26 February 1950. On arrival he was greeted by General Võ Nguyên Giáp and Party General Secretary Trường Chinh. His three-month mission would in the event last seven years (Dương Danh Dy 2006, p. 5).

During his first few years in Vietnam, Luo Guibo helped establish the Chinese Military Advisory Group (CMAG, Nhóm cố vấn quân sự của Trung Quốc) and the Chinese Political Advisory Group (CPAG, Nhóm cố vấn chính trị của Trung Quốc). As head of CPAG, Luo led more than one hundred advisors with expertise in finance, banking and grain supply work to advise the DRV on military affairs, finance and the economy, public security, culture and education, united front activities, party consolidation and legal reform (Olsen 2006, p. 23). Their work entailed introducing Chinese experiences to the Vietnamese; developing macro-level strategies and policymaking procedures; making recommendations on issues pertaining to rules, regulations, and directives; and helping the Vietnamese carry out orders and implement programmes (Dương Danh Dy 2006, p. 16). By 1952 these advisors had become instrumental in helping Hồ Chí Minh and his government introduce the legal apparatuses and policies to consolidate military and socio-political power (Zhai 2000, p. 35; Chen 2001, pp. 129, 331).

Luo Guibo's plan for mobilizing the masses and implementing the experimental stage of land reform for 1953 exemplified Chinese influence on the DRV at this time. Having signed and dated the proposal on 3 September 1952, Luo first sent (*gửi đến*) his proposal to "Thận" — a pseudonym for VWP General Secretary Trường Chinh. Trường Chinh would later serve as the general-director of the Directing Committee on Land Reform (Ủy Ban Chỉ Đạo Cải Cách Ruộng Đất). It is not clear under what circumstances, whether in person or not, Luo delivered the proposal to Trường Chinh. But it may well have reached the general secretary sometime during the occasion on which Luo was invited to attend the meeting of the VWP Politburo in early September (Dương Danh Dy 2006, p. 290). On 9 October 1952, Trường Chinh ordered the transmission

of the proposal to Hồ Chí Minh (Luo 1952). Hồ Chí Minh was, however, away from Vietnam on a secret trip to Beijing and Moscow. He had left Vietnam in mid-September and arrived in Beijing on 29 September. His stay in Beijing was mainly to discuss with Chinese leaders the Northwest Campaign (*chiến dịch Tây Bắc*) and other strategic plans, including land reform. Hồ Chí Minh and the VWP possibly arranged the trip to allow Hồ Chí Minh to join the PRC's envoy attending the Nineteenth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

The proposal thus probably reached Hồ Chí Minh while he was in Moscow to attend that congress, held from 5 to 14 October 1952, and to meet Joseph Stalin and inform him about the situation in Vietnam, including land reform. Following his 28 October meeting with Stalin, Hồ Chí Minh sent Stalin letters on 30 and 31 October, informing the latter of the progress of Vietnam's land reform programme and soliciting his assistance. In the first letter, Hồ Chí Minh stated that he had started developing Vietnam's land reform programme and that he would present it to Stalin. In the second letter, Hồ Chí Minh outlined the VWP's land reform programme and inquired about Stalin's instructions. Hồ Chí Minh indicated that he had planned the programme with the help of Liu Shaoqi. In these exchanges, Hồ Chí Minh also asked Stalin to send Soviet officials to Vietnam to survey the conditions and made an additional request for ten tons of malaria medication, weapons and permission for Vietnam to send fifty to one hundred Vietnamese students to the Soviet Union for military and ideological training. On 29 November Hồ Chí Minh wrote in his farewell letter to Stalin that he would work diligently to implement the land reform and continue waging war against France. He expressed his hope of returning to Moscow in two or three years to report on the results of those efforts (Vo 2015, pp. 19–22; Olsen 2006, pp. 24–25).

The Preliminary Proposal

Luo Guibo presented his proposal at a time when the VWP had garnered the support of both the Soviet Union and the PRC, the

world's most powerful communist states. This support lessened the VWP's need to rely on landlords and well-off peasants for resources to fight the French. It gave the party the backing to carry out land reform as a social, economic and political strategy to consolidate geographical and political power in the countryside. The proposal also came two years after the PRC had started implementing its own programme of land reform in the summer of 1950; the PRC and the advisors that it sent to Vietnam thus had considerable relevant experience. Even earlier, too, Luo Guibo had gained experience of his own while implementing land reform in Jiangxi and Yan'an during the 1930s. This experience qualified him to propose a way for the Vietnamese to mobilize the masses and carry out land reform.

Divided into six sections, the proposal outlined the purposes, requirements and steps necessary to lead a mass mobilization movement, to reorganize the village-commune system (*làng xã*)⁴ and to achieve political dominance in rural areas. The principal objective that it suggested was to ignite the masses to attack and overthrow landowners, to gain political control of rural areas, to appease the peasants, to increase agricultural production and to build support for the resistance against the French (Luo 1952, p. 1). The broader goal of this proposal was to outline the steps needed to amass the material and popular support for the VWP to consolidate. It was written, especially the fundamental principles laid out in its fourth segment, from the viewpoint of the Chinese advisor urging the Vietnamese leadership to adopt a "firm political stance" (*lập trường vững*) and "determined attitude" (*thái độ rõ rệt*) to overcome its fear that mobilizing the masses would startle and divide the united front and cause the landlord class to retaliate (Luo 1952, pp. 2–3).

This encouragement from Luo Quibo appears to have played a role in initiating the VWP's move away from "drawing the landlords into the resistance" (*kéo địa chủ về phe kháng chiến*) (Nguyễn Quý et al. 2001, p. 122) and towards an emphasis on "neutralizing some landlords, and expelling imperialist and reactionary feudal large-landlords" (*trung lập một số địa chủ, đánh đuổi đế quốc và đại địa chủ phong kiến phản động*) (Trùng Chinh 2001a, p. 239). It also represents the Chinese advisor's reassurance to the VWP leadership

that turning on the rich and privileged factions that had previously supported it would not pose undue risks, as the PRC would replace those groups as the primary military and financial backer of the VWP's revolutionary war.

Comparison of the content of Luo Guibo's proposal with VWP rural and mass mobilization policies developed beforehand and afterwards makes clear the Chinese advisor's significant influence on the development of the methodological structure for the party's campaign of mass mobilization — from inception to fulfillment. The contents and language of the first five sections of the proposal became the templates by means of which the VWP leadership expounded its policy direction and rhetoric, principally in directives, decrees, circulars, reports, announcements, and training pamphlets. This influence was most evident in Directive 37/CT/TW, promulgated on 24 April 1953 by VWP General Secretary Trường Chinh on the eve of the experimental mass mobilization campaign, which followed Luo's tone and content to develop the framework for mobilization of the masses (Trường Chinh 1953).

Moreover, the sixth section of the proposal most directly revealed Luo's influence on the VWP's preparations for the start of land reform. To prepare for an experimental campaign that future campaigns could use as a model, Luo recommended carefully laying the ground for mass mobilization in order "to achieve desirable results and avoid derailment" (Luo 1952, p. 6). This work included surveying the countryside, propagating the VWP's policies, training cadres and choosing areas for the implementation of land reform. More specifically, he advised the VWP to assign and train two hundred cadres to carry out this campaign in twenty communes in Interzone I — or Việt Bắc — and in Interzone IV (Luo 1952, pp. 6–7). These two regions had long been the VWP's stronghold.⁵

Having solicited the approval of Stalin and Mao, Hồ Chí Minh worked after his return from Beijing and Moscow with the rest of the VWP leadership to begin to carry out Luo Guibo's proposal on mass mobilization. They took steps to shift their previous stance on land reform. They began by ordering for further investigation

into rural conditions. From 25 to 30 January 1953, they convened the party's Fourth Plenum to begin putting forward objectives and laying the foundation for a massive land reform campaign. This foundation included elaborating many aspects of Luo's proposal and incorporating them into their policy. At the plenum, Hồ Chí Minh read a report underlining the two main tasks requiring attention in 1953 in order to gain a complete victory in the anti-colonial war against the French. These tasks included leading the war against France and its military policy, and mobilizing the masses to reduce rents further and to implement land reform fully. Concerning the land policy, Hồ Chí Minh argued that, because of "special circumstances" (*hoàn cảnh đặc biệt*), only rent and interest rate reduction had been implemented during the years before 1953. However, as circumstances had changed, it was now necessary for the revolution to expand its land policies and to "improve the economic and political interests of the peasants" (*nâng cao quyền lợi kinh tế và chính trị của nông dân*) by enforcing more radical land reforms. These reforms would include redistributing land to the peasants. By accomplishing this feat, the VWP would then be able to mobilize fully the necessary manpower from the peasantry to advance the protracted war and to gain absolute victory (Hồ Chí Minh 2001).

To understand the decision to push forward more radical land reform at this time, it is necessary to accept the reality that land reform had been a leading revolutionary objective of the Communist Party since its establishment in 1930. However, in the initial years of the First Indochina War, the VWP's policies on the farm sector were confined to reducing rents and taxes. It feared that more radical agrarian reform would undermine the unity of the united front against the French by alienating the landowning class. It is important in this context to note that landowners and prosperous peasants were the primary economic supporters of the war effort, as the VWP had yet to get support from its communist allies. As a result, the party could only push more radical policies in zones that were directly under its military control, such as Thái Nguyên, Tuyên Quang, Phú Thọ, Thanh Hóa, Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh (Vo 2010, pp. 30–58).

Once, however, the CCP succeeded in its revolutionary war against the Nationalist government in China and began sending advisors and military and financial support across China's southern border, Vietnamese leaders believed that it was the right time to implement full mobilization of the peasants to eliminate the ruling class in the northern Vietnamese countryside, and to rally the manpower needed to expedite and finish the war against the French.

In a lengthy report following Hồ Chí Minh's speech, Trường Chinh argued that it was necessary to take advantage of the support from the Soviet Union and China simultaneously to overthrow French imperialism and feudalism. Following Luo's recommendations closely, Trường Chinh defined the specific purpose, meaning, motto, and methods of the land reform policies and set out plans for implementing them. His report reflected a shift in the party's stance on landowners by suggesting that the reason that radical land policies had not been implemented during the years prior to 1953 was that the party had overestimated the degree of cooperation of the landowning class. He went on to accuse members of this class of being uncooperative feudal reactionaries who had been working against the party's policies and war efforts. As a result, he aggressively called for "launching the masses thoroughly to reduce rent; to carry out interest rate reduction; to prepare to make progress toward land reform; and to achieve land-to-the-tillers in the free zones".⁶ Only when these policies were fully enforced would the VWP "be able to motivate the peasants enthusiastically to sacrifice for the resistance, step up production, and consolidate the rural government"⁷ (Trường Chinh 2001*b*, pp. 48–53).

On the basis of the objectives that Hồ Chí Minh and Trường Chinh had outlined, the plenum issued a resolution calling for the mobilization of the masses to carry out land reform in areas under the party's direct control (Trịnh Nhu et al. 2001, p. 129). Hồ Chí Minh and the VWP leadership began to decree a series of laws and regulations to pave the way for implementation of Luo Guibo's proposal.⁸ To assist in this crucial stage in the campaign, in the spring of 1953 the CCP appointed Zhang Dequn (Kiều Hiệu Quang) to head

the Land Reform and Party Consolidation Section under the CPAG in Vietnam (Zhai 2000, p. 39). Beijing sent forty-two additional land reform specialists during that same year to strengthen Zhang's team. These advisors taught specially chosen Vietnamese cadres, as recommended in Luo's proposal, how to survey, analyse and classify villages' class and socio-economic conditions. After the land reform cadres had been trained, the VWP launched the experimental mass mobilization campaign on 15 April 1953. The campaign lasted until August 1953, having been implemented in twenty-three communes — three more than Luo's proposal had recommended — of Việt Bắc and Interzone IV (Trần Đức Thịnh 1953).

The experimental mass mobilization campaign was implemented through a complex process that involved multiple steps to incite class struggle. It began with sending a specially trained mass mobilization team of cadres (*đoàn cán bộ*) to a selected site, usually a commune (*xã*), to survey the interclass relations of the people in the commune and categorize them into different social classes. Disguised as peasants, these cadres infiltrated the commune by contacting the poorest peasants and labourers. They became acquainted with the conditions of the peasants by applying the strategy of "three-togethers" (*ba cùng*: eating together, living together, and working together). Through the process of "visiting the poor and asking about their sufferings" (*thăm nghèo hỏi khổ*), cadres implanted in the peasants hatred towards the landowners by contrasting their poverty with the landowners' affluence. They instigated the peasants to take action and rebel against the landowners. Once hatred had been aroused and the conditions for class struggle were ripe, mobilization cadres gathered the commune's landowners and put them on trial before a "special people's court" (*Tòa Án Nhân Dân Đặc Biệt*), in which mobilized peasants were encouraged to accuse and denounce the landowners for crimes and abuses. Following the denunciation session, the courts made decisions on the fate of the landowners, their families and properties. This process of mobilization became the template for the rest of the land reform campaign from April 1953 to July 1956. Ironically, one of the first people put on trial and executed

was Nguyễn Thị Năm, a patriotic landowner who had supported the anti-colonial war and many of the Việt Minh's leaders, including Hồ Chí Minh, Võ Nguyên Giáp, Trường Chinh and Phạm Văn Đồng (Vo 2015, pp. 32–33).

Luo Guibo's proposal may not have been the only or even the final recommendation that led the VWP to move ahead with the land reform programme. But the context in which he offered it and the degree to which the VWP followed his advice suggest that the document served as the structural prescription for the VWP's mass mobilization and land reform campaign of April 1953 to July 1956. It was not a step-by-step blueprint for the long, complex and violent land reform effort, but it was both a framework for Hồ Chí Minh and VWP leaders to elaborate and develop and also a means for the Chinese advisors to continue to exert influence on that effort. More importantly, the proposal shows, for the first time in the study of the DRV's land reform, exactly what Chinese advisors were actually communicating to the VWP's leaders. The document may thus help us understand how those advisors were framing their recommendations and the degree to which the Vietnamese side accepted them. It allows us to understand how both the Vietnamese and the Chinese understood their relationship as they dealt with the social, economic and political situation in Vietnam. That is, the document suggests the belief that a rigorous, even violent, land reform programme was necessary if the VWP was to gain the geopolitical space and manpower required to wage all-out war against France. Only, however, aid from and the endorsement of Beijing would make such a programme possible.

A Valuable Historical Source

I obtained Luo Guibo's "Preliminary Comments on Mobilizing the Masses, 1953" during the course of research in Vietnam between July 2008 and July 2009. The focus of that research was agrarian policies in the DRV during the anti-colonial war against the French from 1945 to 1953. The document was kept at the Vietnam National Archive III, Phan Kế Bính Street in Hanoi. It

was located in the Prime Ministerial Collection (Phòng Phủ Thủ Tướng), Dossier no. 1389, under the title, "*Ý kiến của đồng chí Lã Quý Ba (cố vấn Trung Quốc) về vận động quần chúng năm 1953*" (Preliminary comments by comrade Luo Quibo [Chinese advisor] on mobilizing the masses in 1953). Other documents pertaining to land reform also make specific reference to Chinese advisors and their important roles in training Vietnamese and assisting them in the implementation of certain aspects of land reform. However, Luo Guibo's proposal is one of the very few known documents drafted by a leading Chinese advisor. It thus offers a rare glimpse of the Chinese perspective on and assessment of the situation in Vietnam, as well as illustrating this senior advisor's direct input into the Vietnamese policymaking process.

The copy of the document in the archives was typed in *quốc ngữ*. It is not clear in what language Luo Guibo originally wrote the document. However, from the grammatical structure of sentences and the erratic usage of punctuation, this version seems to have been translated from Chinese. Because of the document's irregular grammar and punctuation patterns, it could be argued that someone under Luo Guibo's command rather than someone from the Vietnamese side, who would have been more familiar with Vietnamese grammar and would have been likely to produce a more fluid translation, translated the proposal. The proposal had a note attached to its front from the office of the VWP general-secretary. It addressed Hồ Chí Minh as "Bác" and read, "Comrade Quý sent to Brother Thận the 'Preliminary Comments on Mobilizing the Masses, 1953,' and Brother Thận is forwarding it to you [Bác] for reference."

My first two requests for permission to read the document were rejected, and it was not until my third try that the staff of the archive granted access to it and permission to make a photocopy. It is not clear how to account for this change of heart, but it was possibly due to the effects of patience and persistence when working in a Vietnamese archive, when requesting documents and when interacting with the staff. Most of my requests in my initial months at the archive were rejected, but that changed in the latter half of my research.

The staff and I had by then become more familiar with each other, and, above all, they had come to know more about my research, the materials that I was looking for and what they thought I was going to use them for.

The document's historical value lies in its revealing little-known aspects of PRC–DRV relations in the early 1950s — an important period in which the DRV depended on the PRC in the implementation of its military and socio-economic policies. Historians have discussed the intimate and crucial relationship between these communist allies at great length, but they have found little documentary evidence to substantiate their claims. This is not because there are no documents to illustrate this relationship, but rather because communist regimes have denied researchers access to those documents. The fall of the Soviet Union and the economic liberalization in China and Vietnam have made archival resources somewhat more accessible. Recent scholars on China–Vietnam relations who have benefited from this change, especially with the availability of Chinese archival sources, in their work include Ang Cheng Guan (1997), Zhai Qiang (2000), Chen Jian (2001) and Mori Olsen (2006).

It is, however, impossible to say the same of Vietnamese scholars trying to gain access to archival sources on exchanges between the PRC and the DRV during the period. Part of the reason for this difference is the historically adversarial relationship between China and Vietnam. Vietnamese have, often with the backing of official narratives, seen China as their country's "*kẻ thù nghìn đời*" (eternal enemy). Recent and ongoing territorial disputes on Vietnam's northern border and in the South China Sea have inflamed anti-China sentiments. These disputes sometimes force the Vietnamese government to distance itself from its past relationship with China. As a result, it often considers evidence of the close relationship between the PRC and the DRV and of China's important role in Vietnam during the First and Second Indochina Wars extremely sensitive. Hence, a document revealing details of Chinese influence on the DRV's land reform campaign, considered by many Vietnamese as the most disastrous policy in the Hanoi government's history, is

not something to which that government might like to see attention drawn.

"Preliminary Comments on Mobilizing the Masses, 1953" merits translation and publication for this reason and for the importance of Luo Guibo's proposal in shaping the implementation of the DRV's land reform and that programme's momentous effect on the First Indochina War and on the VWP's consolidation of power. As unknown and revealing as it is, it may not be the only currently accessible document to demonstrate the important PRC–DRV relationship in this way. Its translation and publication will serve as an encouragement to researchers to seek other such documents, despite the difficulties involved.

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OFFICE OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY⁹

09 October 1952¹⁰

No: 241 VP/TBT

Dear Uncle,¹¹

Comrade Quý¹² sent to Brother Thận¹³ the “Preliminary Comments on Mobilizing the Masses, 1953”, and Brother Thận is forwarding it to you for reference.

Sincerely,
By the order of: Brother Thận

Tuân¹⁴

Preliminary Comments on Mobilizing the Masses, 1953 (for reference)

1. Guideline:

Resolutely mobilize the masses, attack the counter-revolutionary forces, reduce feudal influences to meet the demands of the masses, organize the masses to engage in production and participate in the resistance.

2. Contents:

- a. Expose traitors and tyrants; oppose their appropriation, control, and embezzlement of cultivated lands and properties belonging to pagodas, churches, households and village factions; confiscate their lands and possessions and distribute them to peasants who have no or little farmland.
- b. Examine the issues of rent reduction and interest reduction. (If the investigation reveals that there were landlords who did not follow the rent reduction order as regulated by the rent reduction decree¹⁵ issued by the People's Government, rent reduction must be rigorously employed, and the surplus rent must be returned to the peasants.)
- c. Defray old debts. (If debt interest paid by the peasants to the creditors is twice the principal amount, the peasant does not have to pay interest and only has to pay the principal; if the interest is triple the principal, the peasant does not have to pay either the principal or the interest; after all debt is repaid, the peasant can retrieve the land contracts¹⁶ and mortgaged lands without having to pay any redemption fee. However, this article shall not be applied to loans and debts for commercial purposes.) Note: only lending landowners are [to be categorized as] creditors, [and those in this category] do not include those involved in debt relations between peasants themselves.
- d. Distribute, on an equal and rational basis, village-owned rice fields, pagoda lands, household lands, and lands of Vietnamese traitors to peasants who have no or little cultivable land

(especially to families of soldiers and war dead who have no or little farmland).

- e. Nullify unreasonable feudal regulations¹⁷ concerning mountainous lands and forests, rivers and water bodies, communal houses and pagodas. Regulations are to be judiciously discussed and established by the peasant representatives and managed by local authorities or by the Peasant Associations¹⁸ as requested by the local People's Committees.
- f. Investigate saline-contaminated rice fields, oppose shifting the contribution responsibilities¹⁹ on to the peasants. Equally and reasonably allocate productivity, and repair instances of overcharged or undercharged agricultural taxes.

3. Objective and requirement:

The objective and requirement of this programme is to achieve political advantage in the countryside, consolidate the united front²⁰ in rural areas, unite to boost production, and unite to resist.

4. Fundamental principles to be observed:

- a. It is necessary to have a firm political stance, a determined attitude, full comprehension of the motto "resolutely mobilizing the masses,"²¹ [and] take precautions and subdue the inappropriate viewpoints and ideas listed below. Those are the basic principles required to expand the movement.
 - 1. Fear that resolutely mobilizing the masses may divide the united front and undermine the strength of the resistance forces. It is necessary to know that only by mobilizing the masses and the Party relying on the masses is it possible for the masses to develop massive strength in production and in the resistance war in order to open the rice fields²² and consolidate the united front; only then is it possible to crush the enemy's scheme of undermining our forces; only then is it possible to have the forces to maintain the prolonged resistance war and to switch to a general counterattack.

2. Fear that [resolutely mobilizing the masses] will make the upper factions of the united front confused and frightened. It is necessary to know that as long as policies are thoroughly understood and correctly implemented, strategies are properly utilized, propaganda activities are effectively carried out and mass mobilization is really being implemented, then the majority of the upper class²³ will not be dazed or even temporarily confused; ultimately everything will be fine. Regarding the small number of counter-revolutionaries, the bad people hiding within the resistance front, these people shall be unmasked when the masses rise up. Therefore, it does not have any adverse impacts on the cause of the resistance war if they get confused and scared, or even defect to the enemy, but rather will reduce the strength of the destructive force [in the united front]. For the resistance front, this will only strengthen it, not weaken it.
3. Fear of causing the landlord class to fight back [against the mass mobilization policy] and disperse their properties, which would affect societal security and order in liberated areas and the flow of material resources to the troops. It is necessary to know that as long as we fully understand correctly that the current policy is "to weaken the feudal forces and not to eradicate the feudal forces yet"²⁴ and take hold of the strategy of "winning the majority [peasants], isolating the minority [landowners], taking advantage of their contradictions, and defeating each group,"²⁵ knowing how to implement the guideline of combining production with mass mobilization, and switching to production right after completing mass mobilization, then the opposition posed by the landlord class will not be able to expand, and the opposition of a small number of individuals will be quickly extinguished. Relying on the enthusiastic patriotism and zealous working attitude of the masses will provide the resistance war with an endless amount of manpower, material and financial resources.

In mass mobilization, there may be instances where feudal forces exploit a few extreme “leftist” tendencies²⁶ in the movement to raise their opposing voices and organize struggles against [the movement]. There may even be some cadres who have impure thoughts, unsteady class stance, lack the perspective of the masses, or act on the position of the landlord class and resist the movement. We must be prepared for such possibilities and must have sound measures to deal satisfactorily with such instances. Claims made by the landlord class containing counter-revolutionary implications must be refuted according to the arguments. Acts of resistance by the landlord class must be combatted by relying on the strength of the masses. Acts of resistance by some cadres, in addition to taking preemptive measures to educate [them], must be strictly dealt with by implementing the disciplinary regulations of the Party and laws of the State when such resisting actions occur.

- b. According to the urgent demands of the masses, and in the spirit of consolidating and enlarging the united front in the countryside, and enhancing solidarity to increase production and participate in the resistance war, the central government must stipulate and promulgate necessary policies and ordinances, and the Peasant Associations must issue a political platform for the struggle. The issuance and promulgation of policies, ordinances and guidelines for the struggle shall serve as supportive and protective instruments for the peasants. Cadres assigned to conduct mass mobilization tasks and other cadres of Party, governmental, military and civil authorities must employ such policies, ordinances and guidelines as powerful tools to mobilize the masses, resolve the masses’ ideological concerns, lead the masses to fight against feudal forces in a selective manner, and help the masses resolve their problems within the procedural frameworks permitted by legal policy. The method

of providing top-down supportive and protective measures in combination with bottom-up mass mobilization is the crucial factor that determines whether mass mobilization will succeed or fail.

- c. It is necessary to enhance the leadership of the movement:
 1. Regarding subjects²⁷ to be denounced, subjects to be confiscated, and subjects to be executed, it is necessary to investigate thoroughly, analyse and research; it is necessary to follow the principle that "categories"²⁸ should not be too wide or too large²⁹ and must have the confirmation and approval of authorized leaders, as well as follow certain legal procedures.
 2. Strategies for the struggle must be based on the principles of being reasonable, beneficial and measurable. And the struggle guideline of "attacking while persuading"³⁰ must be mastered and implemented. (In other words, attack and persuade, and even make use of [the subjects] while attacking [them].)
 3. In leading the struggle, it is necessary to grasp the general conduct in mobilizing the thoughts and policies prompted by the masses' aspirations and serving their interests; object to acting as Pooh-Bah³¹ for the masses.
 4. It is necessary to educate and organize the masses for the purposes of uniting to boost production and uniting for the resistance.
 5. If it is necessary to amend or decide on issues related to policies or issues of fundamental importance; it is essential to obtain prior instructions and to report after implementation.
 6. It is necessary always to report on the status of activities to superior authorities for further instructions. The superior authorities must provide their subordinates with detailed instructions, take actions to remedy undesirable findings, and introduce and propagate useful experiences — all in a timely manner.

5. In mass mobilization, incorporate the task of reorganizing the communal organizations:

In order to achieve political advantage for the Party in the countryside, and to guarantee that the policies and ordinances of the Party and the Government are thoroughly and properly implemented, it is necessary to combine mass mobilization with the task of reorganizing communal organizations, such as communal Party cells, Peasant Associations, administration, units of the armed forces.

Currently, the Party's communal cells are operating in a clandestine or partially clandestine manner; counter-revolutionary and feudal forces in the countryside have not been attacked to a significant degree, and administrative apparatuses and leadership still lack experience in implementing this task. Thus, it is necessary to take firmer steps when combining mass mobilization with the task of reorganizing communal organizations and organizational work. Therefore, the task of mobilizing the masses together with the task of restructuring communal organizations and the organizational work of the Party cells in the countryside has to apply the method of relying on the most outstanding elements³² within the Party, expanding the fight against negative trends within the Party (like opposing the ideas and viewpoints belonging to the landlord class, opposing the thoughts and behaviours of distancing from the masses, and opposing corruption and personal profiting,³³ etc.) and to put forth the concept of apperception³⁴ (that is strengthening [cadres'] education on class, policies, and views towards the masses; enhancing [cadres'] class and policy awareness, and [their] conception of the masses). Combine with the task of reorganizing communal organizations but without going through the Party cells, invite the masses to attend Party meetings jointly to investigate Party members and cadres.³⁵ Specific steps to be taken are as follows:

- a) Before commencing mass mobilization, leaders of the Party must delegate cadres down to the lower levels to publicize within the Party the guidelines and policies on mobilizing the masses, penetrate deep into the masses, promote criticism, self-criticism, and ideological struggle within the Party, and listen to the opinions of the masses inside and outside of the Party. Regarding cadres and Party members, after undergoing a preliminary investigation, it is necessary to reconstruct the initial leadership units, replace cadres who have lost their class-based stance and who have to a severe degree lost contact with the masses, and then reorganize the most outstanding Party members to form the leadership teams responsible for leading the mass mobilization movement.
- b) After the working teams complete the task of disseminating propaganda and education, they shall be designated to go to the villages to carry out the task of educating and propagating the policies to the masses and to mobilize the masses to participate in the movement. After the introduction and education activities have achieved desirable results, the masses may elect representatives to attend communal or district peasant representative meetings to carry out the task of promoting further education and training, and to discuss the issue of how to carry out mobilization. The task of electing representatives should aim at the good poor peasants³⁶ who have an active spirit to struggle, with firm class stance, proper behavior, and connection with the masses and a number of good middle peasants.³⁷
- c) After the mass movement has risen, the Party must assemble the strength to lead the mass movement, attack the counter-revolutionary forces and feudal forces, and encourage Party members to take extra actions in the mobilization movement; it is necessary to help backward Party members³⁸ take action.

- d) After the mass mobilization is completed, [the Party] may organize a systematic training course on the Party's regulations and promote criticism and self-criticism, based on the struggles against improper trends within the Party and the struggles against feudal forces outside the Party, to assess the performance of every Party member who has been challenged during the [mass mobilization] struggles, and then investigate and discipline them separately. The principles for investigation and discipline are as follows:
- Elements who are opposed to class standpoints, act as spies, are corrupted or are considered unable to be educated should not be shown any mercy or concession, and must be dismissed from the Party.
 - Party members and cadres who are self-interested, have bad working manners, or are indifferent to the masses, but have been criticized and educated and have agreed to correct those mistakes, after being forgiven by the masses, shall be allowed to correct their weaknesses and improve their contact with the masses.
 - With those who are found to be nominal Party members³⁹ and still fail to meet Party membership requirements even after going through training and participating directly in mass mobilization, they should be encouraged to leave the Party voluntarily. If they do not want to leave, the Party may follow principle and "temporarily defer"⁴⁰ before removing them.
 - With those who are found to be outstanding and active in the struggle, have a strong political stance, are loyal to the revolution, are industrious in production, maintain a close relationship with the masses, and possess proper working styles, [the Party] should confidently promote them to take part in leadership positions, and enlist them in the Party if they meet Party membership requirements.

In the method of reorganizing the Peasant Associations and their operational activities, the communal authorities and communal guerrilla armed forces units incorporate the mass mobilization movement by way of promoting criticism and self-criticism, correct the ideological stance and working conduct of cadres, resolve concerns that the masses have about the cadres, and enhance the solidarity between the masses and the Party [cadres].

The beginning and the middle stages of the mass mobilization campaign must focus their efforts on fighting feudal forces; therefore, [the Party] only has time to discipline bad elements and individuals who are destructive to the movement (e.g., opposing elements of class, reactionary elements, and traitors). Cadres who are found to have improper viewpoints or improper working conduct shall not be dealt with in these stages. While taking action against destructive elements, it is necessary to maintain firm control of the process and not let the masses shift the mobilization objective of fighting against feudal forces towards other purposes, and also not let the feudal forces have any chance to undermine the mobilization.

Reorganization can be considered as the focus of the movement only when the following requirements are met:

1. Political dominance of feudal forces is fundamentally eradicated;
2. Political dominance of the masses is fundamentally consolidated;
3. During mobilization, cadres have been challenged and evaluated to distinguish who is good and who is bad.
4. A large pool of pre-eminent individuals has appeared from within the masses.

The task of reorganizing communal organizations together with mass mobilization must always be attentive to political

consciousness and preventing feudal forces from launching counter-attacks.

6. Preparation tasks for mass mobilization:
For the mass mobilization to achieve desirable results and avoid derailment, it is necessary to prepare properly and adequately. The current phase of preparation has to pay attention to the following issues:
 - a. Investigate and survey to understand the situation. (For example, the situation concerning the thorough implementation of rent and interest reduction, and the confiscation of land belonging to Frenchmen and Vietnamese traitors in order to distribute and utilize village-owned lands;⁴¹ the situation concerning the puppet enemy⁴² and counter-revolutionary feudal forces, as well as their particular characteristics and internal relationships; the situation concerning whether class categorization has been correctly devised; the situation concerning our organizations and operational activities, and especially concerning the cadres.)
 - b. Assign and train cadres. The Party Central Executive Committee should prepare to assign and train 200 cadres, and prepare to organize the task force brigade.⁴³ At least one-third of the chosen cadres must be backbone elements.⁴⁴ [The Party] must try to make cadres fully comprehend policies, guidelines, objectives, and requirements of the mass mobilization campaign, as well as essential principles of the major steps of mass mobilization. Cadres must also be capable of applying such policies, guidelines, objectives, requirements and principles in actual situations.
 - c. Implement large-scale propagation of the policies by means of newspapers, radios, government announcements, cadres making reports before the masses, and composing songs, and etc. ... to broadly disseminate the policies and guidelines of the mass mobilization campaign.

- d. Organize task force brigades to carry out experimental campaigns in focused areas in order to gain experience before commencing mass mobilization on a larger scale. The Party Central Executive Committee should organize twenty (20) task force brigades.⁴⁵ [In] Interzone Việt Bắc and Interzone IV, each interzone should choose ten communes to implement the experimental campaign.

03 September 1952

Quý

NOTES

1. The communist party in Vietnam was established in 1930, originally as the Vietnamese Communist Party (Việt Nam Cộng Sản Đảng) and then transformed into the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP, Đảng Cộng Sản Đông Dương, 1930–45); it was subsequently renamed the Vietnamese Workers' Party (VWP, Đảng Lao Động Việt Nam, 1945–76) and since 1976 has been known as the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP, Đảng Cộng Sản Việt Nam).
2. "Long trời lở đất", which literally translates as "sky-shaking, earth-shattering", is a verbal depiction that many Vietnamese used to stress the terrors of land reform. An example is Hồ Chí Minh's assessment of the campaign in *Nhân Dân* on 18 August 1956, in which he stated that "Land reform is a class struggle against feudalism, a revolution that moves the heavens and shakes the earth. It is fierce and intense." Another example of this expression occurs in the title of Trần Thế Nhân (2010).
3. Some of the most representative studies of the land reform include: Hoàng Văn Chí, *From Colonialism to Nationalism* (1964); Gareth Porter, *The Myth of the Bloodbath: North Vietnam's Land Reform Reconsidered* (1972); Edwin E. Moise, *Land Reform in China and North Vietnam: Consolidating the Revolution at the Village Level* (1983); Nguyen Ngoc Luu's doctoral dissertation, "Peasants, Party and Revolution: The Politics of Agrarian Transformation in Northern Vietnam, 1930–1975" (1987); Trần Phương, *Cách mạng ruộng đất ở Việt Nam* [Land revolution in Vietnam] (1968); Nguyễn Duy Tiến, *Quá trình giải quyết vấn đề ruộng đất ở Thái Nguyên từ sau cách mạng tháng Tám năm 1945 đến hết cải cách ruộng đất* [The process of implementing the right to own land for peasants in Thai Nguyen (1945–1957)] (2000); Phạm Quang Minh's doctoral dissertation,

“Zwischen Theorie und Praxis: Agrarpolitik in Vietnam seit 1945” [Between theory and practice: Agrarian politics in Vietnam since 1945] (2003); Alec G. Holcombe’s doctoral dissertation, “Socialist Transformation in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam” (2014).

4. The “village-commune” (*làng xã*) is the smallest administrative subdivision in rural Vietnam. A rural commune is composed of many villages (*làng*), also known as *thôn*, *ấp*, *xóm* and *bản*, to constitute a subdivision of a rural district (*huyện*), which is in turn a subdivision of a province (*tỉnh*). Land reform was carried out by count of communes; in total approximately 3,563 communes underwent land reform. One of the main objectives of the land reform was to mobilize the masses to overthrow the landowning class and to replace it with new people under the control of the VWP. This process of taking over villages and communes was essential for the VWP to control the countryside.
5. An interzone (*liên khu*) is an administrative grouping of several provinces. The DRV/VWP created six interzones during the “Resistance War” against France. Interzone I (Việt Bắc) was located in the northeast region of the DRV and consisted of Cao Bằng, Bắc Kạn, Lạng Sơn, Thái Nguyên, Hà Giang, Tuyên Quang, Lào Cai, Yên Bái, Sơn La, Lai Châu, Bắc Giang, Bắc Ninh, Phúc Yên, Vĩnh Yên, Phú Thọ, Quảng Yên, Hải Ninh, Hồng Gai Special Zone, and Mai Đà District of Hòa Bình. Interzone IV (*liên khu 4*) was located in the northern half of the Annam region and consisted of Thanh Hóa, Nghệ An, Hà Tĩnh, Quảng Bình, Quảng Trị and Thừa Thiên. These were the two regions in which the VWP had most extensive control over the population during the First Indochina War.
6. “... cần phóng tay phát động quần chúng, triệt để giảm tô, thực hiện giảm tức; chuẩn bị tiến tới cải cách ruộng đất, thực hiện người cày có ruộng ở vùng tự do.”
7. “Làm như thế chẳng những động viên nông dân hăng hái hy sinh cho kháng chiến, đẩy mạnh tăng gia sản xuất, củng cố được chính quyền nông thôn.”
8. Chỉ Thị Của Ban Chấp Hành Trung Ương Về Phát Động Quần Chúng Trong Năm 1953; Sắc lệnh số 133/SL; Sắc lệnh số 149/SL; Sắc lệnh số 150/SL; Sắc lệnh số 151/SL.
9. Office of the General Secretary of the Vietnamese Worker’s Party, headed by Trường Chinh.
10. On this date, Hồ Chí Minh was in Moscow attending the Nineteenth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.
11. Referring to Hồ Chí Minh, who is often referred to in Vietnam as “Bác Hồ” [Uncle Hồ].
12. “Quý” is short for Lã Quý Ba (Luo Guibo), the General Advisor (*Tổng*

- cố vấn*) representing the Chinese Communist Party in Vietnam during this period.
13. "Thận" is another pseudonym for Đặng Xuân Khu (Trường Chinh). It supposedly derives from "cẩn thận" (*careful*) or "thận trọng" (*cautious*), a personal trait for which Đặng Xuân Khu was known.
 14. The identity of "Tuân" is not clear. It is possible that Tuân was a secretary in the Office of the Secretary headed by Trường Chinh.
 15. This refers to decree 78/SL, issued by Hồ Chí Minh, president of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, on 14 July 1949. The decree ordered a 25 per cent reduction of all land rents set prior to 19 August 1945.
 16. "Văn tự" here is a land contract or contract for deed between peasants and landowners. These contracts obligated peasants to pay interest on the debts owed to the landowners due to rental fees or loans.
 17. This suggests the regulations of what was considered the feudal land tenure system that had existed in Vietnam for hundreds of years, including under French colonialism. The VWP promoted land reform as a means of class struggle against the feudal landowning class.
 18. *Nông hội*.
 19. The stated goal of the VWP's land reform programme, from 1945, has always been to redistribute land to the peasantry. However, one of the main emphases of land reform was to increase agricultural production to feed the military. This required an increase in the production tax, which placed a tremendous burden on the peasants, especially from the mid-1940s to the time when Vietnam was able to secure aid from China in the early 1950s. Luo Guibo suggested not placing this entire burden on the peasants.
 20. The united front (*mặt trận thống nhất*) was a broad political organization formed by the leadership of the communist party to join all other political parties and groups and unaligned Vietnamese against the French during the First Indochina War. The purpose was to allow the VWP to depict itself as a nationalist organization leading a nationalist resistance movement. This disguise allowed the leadership of the VWP to gain wide support, even from landowners and rich peasants. In the context of the land reform, the front, especially in rural areas, had as its basis the worker-peasant alliance and operated under the leadership of the working class. The composition of the united front included the working class, the peasantry, the petit-bourgeoisie, the national bourgeoisie and patriotic notables. At certain times, particularly before getting recognition and aid from China, it also attracted elements of the so-called compradore bourgeoisie and the landowning class who supported the independence movement.
 21. *Thăng tay phát động quần chúng* was the motto of the mass mobilization

campaign during land reform. *Thăng tay* is literally the act of fully extending one's arm, though it is commonly understood as acting ruthlessly. *Phát động quần chúng* is mobilizing the masses. As a whole, the motto suggests the unwavering need and willingness to mobilize the masses in order to carry out land reform at any cost.

22. *Mở ruộng*, literally "to open farmland", refers to the opening of uncultivated land for farming. The emphasis is to mobilize the masses to open hillside and forest land for farming to increase production to support the war against France.
23. *Phân từ lớp trên*.
24. *Làm yếu thế lực phong kiến, chưa phải là tiêu diệt thế lực phong kiến*. This expression has to be understood within the political, military and economic context of the First Indochina War. From 1945 to the early 1950s, the anti-colonial war against France relied on support from the rich and landowning gentry. Because of its political and economic weakness, the Communist Party's initial land policies were conservatively applied, in order to appease the rich and poor. It was not until the party-state had secured the support of the Soviet Union and particularly that of the PRC that the landowners became much less important and land policies began to take a critical turn, provoking intensive implementation of class struggle necessary to abolish the traditional Vietnamese elite and to consolidate power. Luo Guibo's statement in this section of the proposal is meant as reassurance to the leadership of the VWP that they should not fear that mass mobilization would divide the united front and undermine the strength of the resistance forces. To reassure them, Luo emphasized that the mass mobilization had to be initiated to weaken, not to eradicate, the feudal forces. Luo was suggesting that the eradication of feudal forces would be left to a later stage of the mobilization movement.
25. *Tranh thủ đa số, cô lập thiểu số, lợi dụng mâu thuẫn, đánh tan từng bọn*. This aspect of winning over the majority, isolating the minority and taking advantage of their contradictions is something to which Mao Zedong referred very often in his speeches. The context in which Luo used the phrase has much to do with the fact that the Soviet Union's and the PRC's diplomatic support and military aid changed the party's relationship with the poor and especially the rich. Luo's emphasis on winning over the peasant majority and isolating the landowning minority was a strong indication of that shift. The phrase *đánh tan từng bọn* (defeat each group), however, is ambiguous; it is not clear to whom Luo was referring, but the phrase might be interpreted in two different ways. The first could be as a reference to defeating each and every single individual or group within the minority landowning class, and the second as a reference to the

complete annihilation of the landowning/ruling class while subjugating the majority peasantry to the party's rule and guidance. While past policies had been aimed at appeasing both social classes and not exploiting conflicts between them, the new policy was, as Luo emphasized, to take advantage (*lợi dụng*) of those conflicts and exploit them to eradicate one group and subjugate the other to the party's control.

26. That is, "*thiên hướng quá 'tả'*". It is interesting that Luo Guibo put "leftist" ("*tả*") in quotation marks here. The context of the paragraph and the proposal imply that mobilization had not been carried out, but in suggesting that "there may be instances where feudal forces" would exploit certain extreme tendencies in the implementation process, Luo is predicting, if not anticipating, that this would occur. This is possibly a reflection of his own experience of land reform in China and of the reaction of the landowning class there. By putting "leftist" in quotation marks, Luo seemed to suggest to the leadership of the VWP scepticism of, if not disagreement with, any accusations that the movement was becoming too radical. This suggests that Luo did believe that the expression "leftist" should be used to label particular practices during mobilization, and that he was encouraging the leaders of the VWP not to be afraid of such accusations. A 6 March 1953 article in *Nhân Dân* (The People), the party's main newspaper, used this reasoning to depict the mobilization against the landowner Nguyễn Thị Năm, the first person to be executed in the land reform. "The experience of the mass mobilization in the case of Cát-hanh-Long proves concretely that we can only be afraid of not mobilizing the masses, of course we cannot be afraid of the masses being too 'leftist'. The reason is that if the masses are sufficiently awakened, they are extremely clear-sighted, they struggle with extreme determination, and they are very disciplined. As such, the mobilization of the masses does not harm but actually strengthens unity" (H.Đ. 6 March 1953). Term such as "leftist tendencies", "leftist deviations", "leftist errors" or "leftist excesses" would later be used by the party-state to cast blame for the violent excesses of the land reform campaign.
27. *Đối tượng* were people whom the VWP categorized as bad or enemy components that must be dealt with.
28. *Diện*, translated as "category", "classification", or "categorization", is a division of people into different social classes and groups, usually to identify who was seen as on the side of the communist revolution and who were the class enemies of the revolution. It is not clear why Luo Guibo placed *diện* in quotation marks, but it is possible that he sought to indicate, during land reform, that there were no set criteria and the meaning of each category and the scope of categorization changed according to

political conditions. During land reform, the VWP, in theory, sorted the rural population into the five categories of landlord, rich peasant, middle peasant, poor peasant, and landless, but the criteria for who belonged to which category varied. Some categories pitted people who were “nationalist” against “traitors” or “reactionaries”.

29. Because of the changes in the categories mentioned in the preceding note 28, it was advised that in the initial stage of mobilization the criteria for each category and the process of categorization should not be too wide. The intention was to avoid creating too quick and big of a change, one that would overwhelm the population and cause disturbances that would go beyond the control of the party and its implementing cadres. The VWP, however, abandoned this reservation in later phases of the land reform, particularly after June 1955, at the end of the 300-day period for people to move and settle under the political system of their choosing provided for in the 1954 Geneva settlement.
30. The origins of “*có đánh có kéo, trong việc đánh lại có kéo*” are unknown, but it suggests a mobilization strategy and an awareness of conditions at the time that Luo Guibo was making his proposal. The strategy suggests a willingness to be flexible in taking aggressive action against landowners. This task, however, was not an all-out assault, at least at the initial stage, but one that also required persuading the landowners to remain loyal to the war effort. This was an important strategy, for, even in suggesting a radical shift to the VWP’s land reform policy, Luo was aware that the initial stage of mobilization could not afford to crush the landowning class and risk causing potential disturbances that could escalate beyond the VWP’s control. The emphasis was on not doing anything that would turn the landowning class completely against the VWP and the anti-colonial movement.
31. *Bao biện làm thay.*
32. *Phân từ ưu tú.*
33. *Tự tư tự lợi.*
34. *Tự giác.*
35. *Đảng viên* (Party members) and *cán bộ* (cadres) were two terms often used to identify those associated with the VWP-led anti-colonial movement. The former was more specific to those who had sworn loyalty to the Communist Party, and the latter encompassed officials, soldiers and others who could be but were not necessarily party members. In the context of the land reform, *cán bộ* often referred to an individual within a core group of personnel having a unifying role, trained and indoctrinated to promote and carry out the interests and tasks of the mass mobilization movement. For example, those tasked with carrying out the land reform were known

as land reform cadres (*cán bộ cải cách ruộng đất*), those responsible for propaganda were known as propaganda cadres (*cán bộ tuyên truyền*) and there were judicial cadres (*cán bộ tư pháp*).

36. *Bần cố nông tốt*.
37. *Trung nông tốt*.
38. *Những đảng viên lạc hậu*.
39. *Những đảng viên hữu danh vô thực*.
40. *Tạm hoãn* (to defer temporarily). It is not clear why this term was put in quotation marks, but the sentence suggests that the party should first follow a principle of order, suggesting that there might be a process that allowed party members to contest the party's rulings concerning their membership. Hence, one may infer that *tạm hoãn* in quotation marks suggested a stalling tactic to appease temporarily those to whom the party suggested that they remove themselves from the party, possibly to avoid having those members cause trouble. The implication, however, was that they would be removed at a different time.
41. *Công điền, ruộng công* or *công thổ* are communal rice fields or lands belonging to the village community. Before 1945, most Kinh villages in Vietnam had a certain amount of cultivable land designated as communal lands, administered under village charter (*hương ước*). The lands were in theory used to generate revenue to cover the village's communal expenses, to help individuals or families in dire need and to compensate those who had contributed to the village.
42. *Địch ngụy* (puppet enemy or puppet regime) is a term that the communists used to describe the State of Vietnam (Quốc Gia Việt Nam), an associated state within the French Union created in March 1949 following an accord reached by the French and former Emperor Bảo Đại. The formation of this state, though it still remained legally subordinate to the French, became in the eyes of the VWP a threat to the DRV's of authority over all of Vietnam. During the land reform, the VWP was extremely suspicious of the State of Vietnam and of any policies that that state proposed, including its own agrarian reform programme. For the communists feared that it would attract the allegiance of many nationalist Vietnamese and pull them away from the VWP-led anti-colonial movement. Hence, anyone associated with the State of Vietnam was considered a puppet enemy. In land reform, those whom the VWP targeted were readily branded as associates of the State of Vietnam.
43. For the actual campaign, the VWP initially trained approximately 230 cadres; it added more recruits in the later stages of the campaign.
44. *Cốt cán* referred to a specially trained group of land reform cadres who were to lead the attack on the landowning class. They were considered the

- backbone of the movement. Some had been recruited from the ranks of the party or from among DRV officials, while others were peasants who had been chosen by the land reform cadres to lead village mobilization.
45. Instead of twenty communes, as Luo Guibo recommended, the VWP implemented mass mobilization in twenty-three communes — ten in Việt Bắc and thirteen in Interzone IV.

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